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ZNY CCCCC ZZH
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FM AMEMBASSY BAMAKO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0216
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE
RUEHAS/AMEMBASSY ALGIERS 0616
RHMFISS/HQ USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAMAKO 000217

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/09/2019
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SUBJECT: LOCAL ELECTIONS TRUMP TUAREG REBEL CONCERNS IN
NORTHERN MALI

REF: BAMAKO 00211

Classified By: Political Officer Aaron Sampson, Embassy Bamako,
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1.(C) Summary: On April 7 National Assembly Deputy and Tuareg rebel Alliance for Democracy and Change (ADC) spokesman Ahmada ag Bibi said the Malian government was unwilling to take any additional steps toward implementing the Algiers Accords until after Mali's April 26 local elections. Ag Bibi met with the Algerian Ambassador to Mali and Minister of Territorial Administration Kafougouna Kone on April 3 to discuss restarting Accords implementation. Ag Bibi said the most important issues for the ADC were the creation of mixed military units, the immediate liberation of approximately 22 Tuareg rebels imprisoned in Bamako, and the dissolution of Tuareg and Arab militias. The only indications of progress toward mixed military units appears to be the creation of a new acronym - the USS or Special Security Units - and the ADC's decision to nominate Commandant Moussa Bah to be the mixed units' senior Tuareg officer. Meanwhile, Tuareg anxiety over the status of approximately 22 rebels captured during Mali's January and February offensive against rogue Tuareg rebel leader Ibrahim Bahanga is growing. On April 5 Malian authorities allowed the National Assembly Deputy from Kidal, Alghabass ag Intallah, to meet with just two of the Tuareg prisoners in Bamako. Ag Bibi refused the Malian's offer, stating that he would only see all of the prisoners. Although he hasn't spoken with any of these individuals personally, ag Bibi said Tuareg rebel prisoners had been "badly beaten" and "badly tortured" by Malian authorities. End Summary.

Local Elections Overshadow Algiers Accords

2.(C) On April 7 National Assembly Deputy and ADC spokesman Ahmada ag Bibi provided a brief resume of his April 3 meeting in Bamako with the Algerian Ambassador to Mali, Minister of Territorial Administration Kafougouna Kone, and Algiers Accords Steering Committee Chairman Mahamadou Diagouraga. The group met to discuss jump-starting the stalled Algiers Accords implementation process. Ag Bibi said he encouraged his Malian and Algerian colleagues to create special mixed units, finance "economic reinsertion" payments for Tuareg youth, dissolve the ethnic Tuareg and Arab militias, liberate Tuareg rebel prisoners, and start working on "big" development projects - all as soon as possible. Minister Kone reportedly said Mali could do nothing until after local elections on April 26 and asked ag Bibi to be patient. Ag Bibi responded by noting that the Tuareg prisoners had nothing to do with local elections and should be released immediately. Minister Kone subsequently promised to raise the question with President Amadou Toumani Toure.

Tuareg Rebel Prisoners

3.(C) Perhaps in response to ag Bibi's demarche, Mali authorized him and fellow National Assembly Deputy from Kidal, Alghabass ag Intallah, to visit two of the twenty-two Tuareg rebel prisoners on April 5. Not to be confused with three other Tuaregs recently captured by Malian security services in connection with the AQIM hostage crisis, most if not all of the imprisoned Tuaregs on ag Bibi and Alghabass' radar screen were captured during Mali's January and February offensive against Ibrahim Bahanga. Alghabass ended up visiting the two individuals by himself as ag Bibi refused the Malian's offer, stating that he would rather see all of the prisoners upon their liberation. Although he has not personally visited the Tuareg rebel prisoners, ag Bibi said they had been badly "beaten" and "tortured" by Malian authorities. Like Alghabass, ag Bibi also warned that impatient Tuaregs in Kidal could attempt to capture a detachment of Malian soldiers at any moment to help accelerate their fellow rebels' release from prison in Bamako (Ref. A). "Everyone is wondering," said ag Bibi of his fellow Kidal Tuaregs, "why they have not been liberated."

4.(C) During the morning of April 7 ag Bibi and Alghabass held a similar meeting with National Assembly President Diounounda Traore prior to the opening of Mali's April National Assembly Session. Ag Bibi said he and Alghabass stressed the need to release Tuareg prisoners, dissolve the ethnic Tuareg and Arab militias now roaming northern Mali, and immediately constitute mixed military units - or the USS - per the Algiers Accords. The National Assembly President

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also promised to relay this information to President Toure.

Ethnic Militias and the USS

5.(C) Ag Bibi urged both Minister Kone and National Assembly President Traore to speed the dissolution of ethnic Tuareg and Arab militias in northern Mali and accelerate the constitution of what ag Bibi labeled Special Security Units (USS). Ag Bibi regarded the two measures as complimentary, with the USS assuming the peace and security duties currently performed by locally recruited militias. Ag Bibi alleged that Imghad Tuareg militias led by Malian military Col. Elhedj Gamou and ethnic Arab militias led by Col. Abderahmaneould Meydou and Col. Lamanaould Bdou were deeply involved in drug and arms trafficking. He reported that Col.ould Meydou led a mixed force of regular military - primarily comprised of soldiers from northern Mali - and a small group of locally recruited civilian militiamen. Col. Lamana's Arab militia, on the other hand, is entirely composed of hand-picked ethnic Arab civilians with detailed knowledge of northern Mali's smuggling trade.

6.(C) Ag Bibi estimated that approximately 600 Tuaregs are waiting to be integrated into the USS. He said the ADC had designated Commandant Moussa Bah to serve as the USS' senior Tuareg officer, allaying concerns that Tuaregs might attempt to reinstate chronic military deserter Hassan Fagaga to his former role as mixed unit commander.

Comment: Swapping Militias for Mixed Units

7.(C) Replacing ethnic paramilitary groups with mixed units under the direct command of the Malian Etat Major seems rather straight forward. It would fulfill key Algiers Accords obligations: creating mixed units would presumably enable Mali to reduce the numbers of southern Malian troops in Kidal; prevent a security vacuum in the north; give Mali a much needed pretext for the difficult political calculations

behind disbanding private militia units; and probably save the Malian treasury money by shifting security responsibilities away from less prepared southern Malian soldiers who don't want to be in Kidal to soldiers who are from the area and know the terrain. The Malian government, however, seems to be going in the opposite direction by expanding rather than reducing its military footprint in the north.

8.(C) One has to give Minister Kone credit for his honesty. As Minister of Territorial Administration, General Kone's official responsibilities involve not the implementation of peace agreements with the Tuaregs but the organization and administration of local elections. Organizing successful local elections clearly take precedence over Tuareg complaints for both Kone and President Toure. Ironically, many Tuareg rebels are also focused on local elections as several members of the ADC are running for local offices across the region of Kidal. This could mean that Tuareg rebel leaders will be too consumed with their political campaigns to worry about fellow rebels imprisoned in Bamako at least until the election results are tabulated. Or, the election season could provide an opportunity for a disgruntled rebel to embarrass the central government and cast a shadow over the administration of the elections in Kidal by attacking a Malian military patrol.

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